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STATE FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH, SILBERSTEIN, FOOKS,
STINCHCOMB); DEFENSE FOR FATA, BEIN; NSC FOR BRAUN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA- DODIK CONDEMNS VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS
OUTSIDE US BRANCH OFFICE IN BANJA LUKA

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. On February 21, approximately 1500 violent demonstrators protesting Kosovo's declaration of independence moved on the US Branch Office in Banja Luka, prompting its evacuation. The Ambassador phoned Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Milorad Dodik to relay strong USG concern over the unfolding events, and demand the full protection of RS security forces. The Ambassador also informed Dodik that the Branch Office would remain closed in the near-term. Dodik condemned the violent actions, and disavowed any RS government role in their organization. Dodik pleaded with the Ambassador to keep the Branch Office open. However, in light of the Prime Minister's statement that "sporadic violence" could still occur, the EAC determined that the Branch Office will remain closed on February 22. (Note. While we later learned that the Branch Office had not suffered damage in the attempted attack, the Ambassador confirmed the EAC decision to close on February 22 in light of the prospect of further violent demonstrations. End Note.) End Summary.

12. (SBU) A fast growing, violent group of protesters gathered in central Banja Luka at 1200 on February 21. The crowd quickly grew from several hundred to an estimated 1500. As the numbers rapidly expanded, the RS police lost control of the demonstrators who began moving on the Banja Luka Branch Office. The crowd engaged local police officers approximately half a block from the Branch Office. Several police officers were injured in the confrontation, and several reportedly took no action to stop the protesters. RSO personnel at the scene reported large rocks being thrown at the Branch Office. Prior to the protest, local staff and Head of Office had already vacated the premises.

13. (C) The Ambassador phoned RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik at 1500 to relay strong USG concern over the unfolding events in Banja Luka. After expressing concern for the policemen injured in protecting our facility, the Ambassador told Dodik that it was apparent that the RS police had lost control of the situation, and it was even more troubling that accounts indicated some police had failed to attempt to check the violent actions of the protesters. The Ambassador informed Dodik that he had decided to keep the Banja Luka Branch Office closed on February 22 with the possibility of extending the closure if the security situation did not improve. In closing, the Ambassador directly asked Dodik two questions: 1) Should we continue to have confidence in his ability to control the situation?; and, 2) Were the violent

demonstrations directed at the Branch Office an attempt by Banja Luka to send a message to the USG?

14. (C) An audibly nervous Dodik responded that he had been unaware of the seriousness of the demonstrations, as he had been in meetings with the British and then German Ambassadors. Dodik condemned the acts and assured the Ambassador that the RS government would take all measures to control the situation and prevent any further violent actions against the Branch Office. Dodik said that the protesters had currently moved across town and were engaged in further violent demonstrations directed against the RS National Assembly (RSNA) building. The fact that the RSNA was being targeted, Dodik said, was clear indication that his government had no role in fomenting the violence. Dodik told the Ambassador that he and other senior RS leaders had done "everything possible" in recent days to "calm the situation," and to maintain a peaceful character for all protests. Dodik stressed that no one from "political institutions" were behind the demonstrations, and that the protests were organized by unspecified "radical elements." Dodik also promised to prosecute any individuals who took part in violent actions against the Branch Office, and "immediately fire" any policemen who stood aside in the face of the demonstration.

15. (C) Dodik pleaded with the Ambassador to keep the Branch Office open, saying its closure would "send the wrong message." Dodik pledged to fully compensate the USG for any material damage to the building, and to provide "all security necessary" for the Branch Office to operate. (Note. At approximately 1700, local RSO personnel were able to re-enter the Branch Office, with RS police escort, and report that there was no damage to the facility. End Note.) The Ambassador asked Dodik if he could guarantee that no further

violent demonstrations would occur, and Dodik responded that he was "afraid that sporadic violence" could take place in the coming days. With that in mind, the Ambassador told Dodik, safety necessitated closing the office on February 22 and reviewing its operational status over the weekend. Dodik pledged to keep the Ambassador fully informed with security updates.

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